



# Indiana State Department of Health

## Epidemiology Resource Center

### Quick Facts

#### **About...Surgical Site Infections (SSI)**

##### **What is a surgical site infection (SSI)?**

A surgical site infection, or SSI, is an infection that a person may get after having surgery. The infection occurs at the part of the body where the surgery was done and can range from a moderate infection of the skin all the way to a very serious infection involving deeper tissues and organs.

##### **How are SSIs spread?**

The germs that can cause SSIs can be spread in a number of ways. They can be carried on the hands of healthcare workers or visitors and then transferred to the patient during treatment. Germs might also be present on surgical equipment or supplies that have not been cleaned properly. Other germs might be naturally present on the skin or inside certain areas of the body (such as the bowel) and can cause an infection if introduced into the rest of the body.

##### **Who is at risk for an SSI?**

Any person having surgery can be at risk for getting an SSI. Patients that are more at risk include the elderly and anyone who has a weakened immune system. In addition, people who smoke are also at more risk for developing infections.

##### **How do I know if I have an SSI?**

Your healthcare provider will determine whether you have an infection. Sometimes they are able to determine this by visually examining the surgical site and other times they might need to take a blood sample or a skin swab for testing.

##### **What are the symptoms of SSIs?**

SSIs can cause a wide range of symptoms including pain, heat, redness, swelling, and drainage near the surgery site. You might also develop a fever.

### **How can SSIs be treated?**

Treatment for SSIs depends on the severity of the infection as well as the type of germ that caused the infection. Many SSIs can be treated with antibiotics, but some require additional surgeries to treat the infection.

### **How are SSIs prevented?**

One of the best ways to prevent SSIs is with proper hand hygiene. Your healthcare provider should always wash their hands with soap and water and use an antiseptic before performing surgery. They should also use a mask, gloves, gown, and cap. When preparing a patient for surgery, patients will often be given antibiotics shortly before the surgery and the hair on the area of the skin where the incision will be made is removed with clippers. Razors should not be used. The skin should also be properly cleaned with an antiseptic solution.

Anyone that tends to the surgical site after surgery should wash their hands or use an alcohol-based hand rub, as well as wear gloves. The surgical site should remain clean and dry, so bandages should be changed if they become soiled. Patients should also refrain from smoking, as that increases the risk of infection.

All information presented is intended for public use. For more information about Surgical Site Infections, please refer to:

<http://www.cdc.gov/HAI/ssi/ssi.html>

<http://www.cdc.gov/hai/>

<http://www.in.gov/isdh/24769.htm>

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